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ABSTRACT

This document gives an overview of the "Calling the Roll" program, a two-state study-circle program. Study circles employ a public-engagement model that fosters dialogue among diverse individuals and groups. This report explores how participation in study circles affects the education policymaking process, and it examines the process of implementing a statewide program of study circles. The report is divided into five sections. Section 1 provides a summary of the program. Section 2 presents background information on public engagement and the policymaking process and explores deliberative dialogue and how the study-circle model encourages deliberative dialogue about education. Section 3 describes the statewide implementation of the "Calling the Roll" program in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Section 4 presents a description of the study, outlining the key questions and the research approach, along with site and sample selection criteria and data-collection processes. Section 5 provides a brief overview of the collaborative-research effort among the various organizations involved in the program. The study will provide educators and legislators needed information on the implementation of the program, as well as its short-, mid-, and long-term effects. A bibliography, a glossary, and a list of acronyms appear at the end. (RJM)

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# *Calling the Roll:* State-wide Study Circle Program on Education in Arkansas and Oklahoma

## Program Description and Research Plan

December 1998

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# State-wide Study Circle Program on Education in Arkansas and Oklahoma

## Program Description and Research Plan

December 1998

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# SECTION I

# SUMMARY OF THE *CALLING THE ROLL* PROGRAM AND THE SEDL RESEARCH STUDY

## *Calling the Roll*

*Calling the Roll* is a two-state education study circle[1] program scheduled to take place during September through November of 1998 in Arkansas and Oklahoma. This project is a collaborative effort that has been ongoing since the fall of 1997, primarily through the efforts of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), Arkansas Friends for Better Schools (AFBS), and the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVO). These partners are working to plan, implement, and learn from study circles, a public engagement model that fosters dialogue among diverse individuals and groups. Two university-based partners—Center for Research on Teaching and Learning at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Oklahoma, Norman Department of Sociology, representing AFBS and LWVO, respectively—are working with SEDL and SCRC to evaluate the program and examine its impact.

## SEDL's Participation in *Calling the Roll*

Part of SEDL's organizational mission is to build and apply knowledge about how state education policy development can be improved. In 1997, SEDL staff identified public deliberation as a potentially important process for aiding and improving state policy work. SEDL staff, guided by experts in the field, chose the "study circle" model as an effective engagement tool to examine the process of public deliberation and its benefit to state policymakers. SEDL's primary interest in the *Calling the Roll* program is how policymaker participation in study circles affects the state education policy development process and the lessons to be learned from implementing a state-wide study circle program that includes policymakers.

The two state partners (AFBS and LWVO) will provide the bulk of coordination and lead the implementation of the state-wide study circles. Because the benefit of study circles to the policymaking process is of key importance to SEDL, staff will work with these organizations to secure the participation of state-level policymakers in the program. SEDL staff will also work closely with SCRC to develop materials for study circle sessions,

[1] Special terms related to the program and research project are defined in the glossary, which appears at the end of this document.

including discussion materials for session three of the study circles and an education resource guide for each program state.

To gather information related to its interest, SEDL will begin work on a multi-phase research study of *Calling the Roll* in June of 1998 and will continue this study beyond the 1999 legislative sessions in Arkansas and Oklahoma. Key features of the study are summarized below, and a detailed discussion of the research plan appears in Section IV of this document.

## *Calling the Roll* Research Study

SEDL's research study of *Calling the Roll* has two major goals: 1) explore how participation in study circles affects the education policymaking process, and 2) learn about the process of implementing a state-wide program of study circles on education that includes state policymakers. SEDL staff will conduct an impact study of program effects on state policymaking and a process evaluation of the state-wide implementation of study circles in Arkansas and Oklahoma. These two complementary research approaches will rely on the following data collection methods: interviews, surveys, observation, and collection of written documents. In order to track the implementation process over time and to record short-, mid-, and long-term effects of the program, SEDL will collect data before, during, and after the study circles are implemented in the fall of 1998. Follow-up interviews and surveys also will be conducted to gauge the effect of study circles on state education policy activities during the 1999 legislative session. Analyses will be performed on qualitative data using a coding method developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990); frequency and central tendency calculations will be performed on quantitative research data.

## Document Organization

The purpose of this document is to give a brief overview of the *Calling the Roll* program and to present the overall plan for the SEDL research study of *Calling the Roll*. SEDL will use this as a working document for SEDL staff, program partners, and external peer reviewers.

Following this summary are four sections organized as follows: Section II presents background information on public engagement and the policymaking process; Section III describes the state-wide implementation of the *Calling the Roll* program in Arkansas and Oklahoma; Section IV presents the SEDL research study; and Section V provides a brief overview of the collaborative research effort between SEDL, SCRC, UALR, and UON. A bibliography, a glossary, and a list of acronyms appear at the end of the document for the reader's reference.

## SECTION II

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS: THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE[2]

## Education Reform and Local Communities

Across the nation, education problems are framed, solutions designed, and reforms initiated in an environment of continued concern about the quality of public education. National and state education legislation as well as local school policies are continually created and enacted to address a wide range of issues such as school choice, school finance, curriculum content, and achievement standards.

Generally, public opinion polls and focus groups reveal that local communities are concerned with the state of public schools and with current reform efforts (Johnson & Immerwahr, 1994; Johnson, 1995; Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996). Through these types of information-gathering processes, communities and individuals have expressed both a low level of confidence in public school quality and dissatisfaction with many recent attempts at school reforms. At the same time, however, these same individuals confess a low level of personal involvement with their local schools and infrequent participation in elections and school activities. These findings point to a wide gap between local communities and the process of education reform. A number of explanations exist for the disconnection between individuals and education policy, including public apathy, distrust in the policymaking process, a perceived lack of involvement opportunities, cultural barriers, and ineffective communication processes that engage local communities.

## Public Engagement and the Policymaking Process

The growing tension between public dissatisfaction with education reform directions and powerlessness to effectively take part in guiding or setting these directions has important implications for those people who establish much of the context for local district and school reform—state policymakers. Legislators, state board of education members, and chief state school officers are faced with declining public trust in their decisions and a sometimes startling lack of public support for implementing the education reform policies they set into motion (Mutchler, 1993).

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[2] A full discussion of public engagement and the policymaking process will be addressed in a forthcoming document that will present a literature review and conceptual analysis of deliberative dialogue and the policymaking process. That document will be incorporated in the results report of this research.

Efforts by policymakers to gain greater certainty of constituents' positions and preferences relative to public education typically depend on time-honored methods of communication and information gathering. Policymakers rely on staff surveys of constituents, polls, information gathered from expert and non-expert interest groups, hearings, and informal communications with constituents. Unfortunately, these sources of information may neither accurately reflect majority constituent perceptions nor reveal certain minority perceptions. Moreover, they cannot reflect the opinion of all constituents who must accept and support education reform set in motion by state policy, if such reform is to be successfully implemented and sustained (Yankelovich, 1991).

## Deliberative Dialogue—A Public Engagement Tool for the Policymaking Process

These tensions call for an examination of why and how state policymakers might interact with the public in some fundamentally different ways as they gather information, debate, and ultimately create the state policy context for local education reform in our nation of increasingly diverse communities. In order to focus its policy-relevant research project on a specific public engagement model and to identify important uses of interactive processes for policymaking, SEDL solicited input from regional policy analysts during an October 1996 "Networkshop," from experts in public engagement at a February 1997 roundtable, and through individual interviews with policymakers in the spring of 1998.

As a result of these information-gathering activities, SEDL identified "deliberative dialogue" as a public engagement tool of potential importance for state policymakers. Deliberative dialogue has a long history in the United States, beginning in the Chautauqua adult education movement of the late 19th century. Across the nation, deliberative dialogue is now being implemented by community service organizations, interfaith religious groups, public agencies, and others to help the public gain a better understanding of local problems and build commitment toward resolving them.

Input from these meetings and interviews also contributed to the following conclusions regarding deliberative dialogue and education policy[3]:

- Deliberative dialogue is an inclusive, democratic public engagement method that asserts the responsibility of individual stakeholders and gives them a role in setting the social or political agenda by

[3] Detailed results of these initial inquiries will be available in a separate document entitled "Results from Interviews of Policymaker Users of Deliberative Dialogue" (currently in draft form).

involving them in weighing multiple perspectives, choices, and consequences.

- Output from deliberative dialogue appears to include better informed (although not necessarily consensus) opinions, clearer definitions of persistent problems, more coherent perceptions of the range of solutions and their consequences, and a sense of public priorities.

- Promising uses of dialogue by state education policymakers might include a way to better manage tough policy decisions, gauge the level of public concern about particular problems, test ideas, discern the majority point of view, redefine the social compact around public education goals, and build "social capital" for implementing decisions.

## Study Circle Model for Encouraging Deliberative Dialogue About Education

There are a number of interactive processes that are being used across the nation to accomplish these kinds of public engagement goals in the context of improving education. National organizations dedicated to education (among them the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Education Commission of the States, the Institute for Educational Leadership, the National Parents and Teachers Association, and Phi Delta Kappa) are applying and studying dialogue strategies, most of which are based largely on two existing models refined and facilitated by private, non-profit foundations: study circles (Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, Connecticut) and National Issues Forums (Kettering Foundation, Dayton, Ohio).

The study circle process is judged by SEDL to be particularly suited to engaging state policymakers and the public in dialogues about education for two reasons. First, at the study circle level itself, community members and their public officials interact about education in ways that differ from traditional public polls, legislative hearings, strategic planning sessions, school board meetings, and other settings. The process is a semi-structured, multi-step approach to engaging people over time in small group discussions. The study circle is facilitated by a community member trained to lead civil, thoughtful dialogue. The study guide on education developed by the Study Circles Resource Center is used to direct participant dialogue through four or more meeting sessions—progressing from discussion of personal experiences about education, to deliberation about different perspectives on education issues, and finally to consideration of possible actions that might solve problems identified by study circle participants.

Second, the study circle process is increasingly being implemented as a community-wide model capable of engaging broader and more diverse segments of the public and providing a structure for identifying joint action to solve community problems. During the last five years, local groups throughout the nation have coordinated and convened community-wide study circle programs that often result in community action, including local policy change (SCRC, 1997a). This expansion of deliberative dialogue to include more constituents and consider policy-relevant action has potential impact not only for local communities, as they work to improve their public schools, but also for state policymakers as they work to improve their state education policymaking.

# SECTION III

## DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD PROGRAM, *CALLING THE ROLL*

This section provides an overview of the *Calling the Roll* program, including a summary of major events, description of the interests that each partner brings to the program, and a program timeline. Note that this section is meant to provide a context for the SEDL research plan that begins in detail in Section IV.

### Program Summary

As stated previously, *Calling the Roll* (CR) involves the implementation of the study circle model in communities throughout the states of Arkansas and Oklahoma during the fall of 1998. CR planning and collaboration among SEDL, the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), and two state partner organizations (Arkansas Friends for Better Schools and the League of Women Voters of Oklahoma) have been ongoing since the fall of 1997. The interests of each program partner differ, ranging from developing a public engagement process useful for state policymakers to increasing civic participation in education, to encouraging discussion on education issues. All partners also share an interest in studying the process and impacts associated with the *Calling the Roll* program.

Each state partner organization will sponsor the effort in its own state, develop its own coalitions, build local networks, coordinate the CR program, and provide support and information for research activities. SCRC will provide technical assistance in facilitating community-wide study circle programs, ranging from advice on organizing strategies to help on communications and facilitator training. SCRC will also conduct a locally-focused process evaluation. SEDL will assist in implementing the study circle program in both states by informing and involving state policymakers in the program, by developing program discussion materials (including state-specific education resource guides), and by providing seed money to each of the state coordinating organizations. Most importantly, as discussed in Section IV of this document, SEDL will investigate the study circle model, explore impacts on the education policymaking process, and develop products to disseminate learnings.

Table 3.1 on the next page presents an overview of the responsibilities and roles of each of the program partners.

**Table 3.1: *Calling the Roll* Partner Responsibilities and Roles**

| Partner Responsibility | SEDL | SCRC | AFBS | LWVO |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coordinate at multi-state level | X | X | | |
| Coordinate at state level | | | X | X |
| Coordinate at community level | | | X | X |
| Engage policymakers | X | | X | X |
| Provide resources | X | X | X | X |
| Provide technical assistance | | X | | |
| Conduct or support research study on CR[4] | X | X | X | X |
| Publish report on research results[4] | X | X | X | X |
| Develop products for dissemination[4] | X | X | | |

[4]Includes post-program activities

The two state partner organizations (AFBS and LWVO) are contracted to coordinate the CR program in ten or more communities in their respective states. Community sponsors will coordinate a kick-off forum, a series of four study circle sessions in one or more sites, and a community-wide action forum in their respective communities. Study circles will be open to all who wish to participate. AFBS and LWVO will implement programs in both urban and rural communities and will emphasize recruitment of study circle participants who reflect the diversity of their state's populace.

Through letters and personal communications, SEDL staff will recruit up to ten policymakers (defined as legislators and other key state-level education decisionmakers) in each state to participate in study circles (preferably one policymaker per community). An additional three policymakers among those who are unable to attend the study circle sessions will be recruited in each state to receive reports generated as a result of the study circles. SEDL also will invite selected legislative aides, governors' education liaisons, and policy analysts from the state departments of education to participate in or observe study circles.

As a result of the collaborative planning process, program partners decided to adopt a study circle discussion guide that was used with previous study circle programs on education. This discussion guide, *Education: How Can Schools and Communities Work Together to Meet the Challenge*, was developed by SCRC to facilitate discussion around education issues that are important at the community level. However, to ensure that a portion of the study circle discussion guide covers an issue relevant to state education policy

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development, the partners will work to develop discussion materials on accountability to replace the existing study circle session three guide.

## Interests of Program Partners

Each CR partner has specific interests in the program that are unique to the needs of its state and/or organization as discussed in the text below and summarized in Table 3.2.

SEDL's overall mission is to improve education within the Southwestern Region, and its specific interest in the CR program is the possibility of enhancing the policymaking process through dialogue among policymakers and the public on education issues. As elaborated in the description of the SEDL research study (beginning in Section IV), SEDL plans to use the opportunities that CR presents to learn about program impacts on the state education policymaking process and to examine strategies important to implementing and involving state policymakers in state-wide study circles on education.

SCRC is interested in learning what planning and implementation needs arise from scaling up the community-wide study circle program model to the state-wide and multi-state levels. SCRC is also interested in learning about involving policymakers in the process and learning more about the general effectiveness of study circles.

Arkansas Friends for Better Schools has a specific interest in implementing (and eventually institutionalizing) the study circle model to enhance public knowledge about education and increase public support and participation in public schools. The League of Women Voters in Oklahoma would like to inform individuals on education issues and increase participation in civic matters related to education, including increased interaction between public officials and constituents.

**Table 3.2: *Calling the Roll* Program Partners' Interests**

| | |
|---|---|
| **SEDL** | 1. Increase collaboration with state and local entities whose mission is to improve public education.<br>2. Enhance the connection between policymakers and the public for the purpose of improving education policy.<br>3. Learn from the implementation of study circles on education that include policymakers, documenting impacts on state education policymaking and gaining insights on successful implementation strategies. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **SCRC** | 1. Learn how to adapt the community-wide SC model and SCRC technical assistance to support state-wide and multi-state study circle programs.<br>2. Learn more about the effectiveness of study circle programs.<br>3. Study the process of including policymakers in study circles. |
| **AFBS** | 1. Increase community involvement in and support of public schools.<br>2. Implement community-wide study circles on education and institutionalize the study circle model as a problem-solving strategy for communities.<br>3. Enhance public knowledge, understanding, and attitudes about public education. |
| **LWVO** | 1. Educate the public on education issues.<br>2. Enhance civic participation, particularly with respect to schools and other educational opportunities.<br>3. Increase direct involvement of public officials with constituents. |

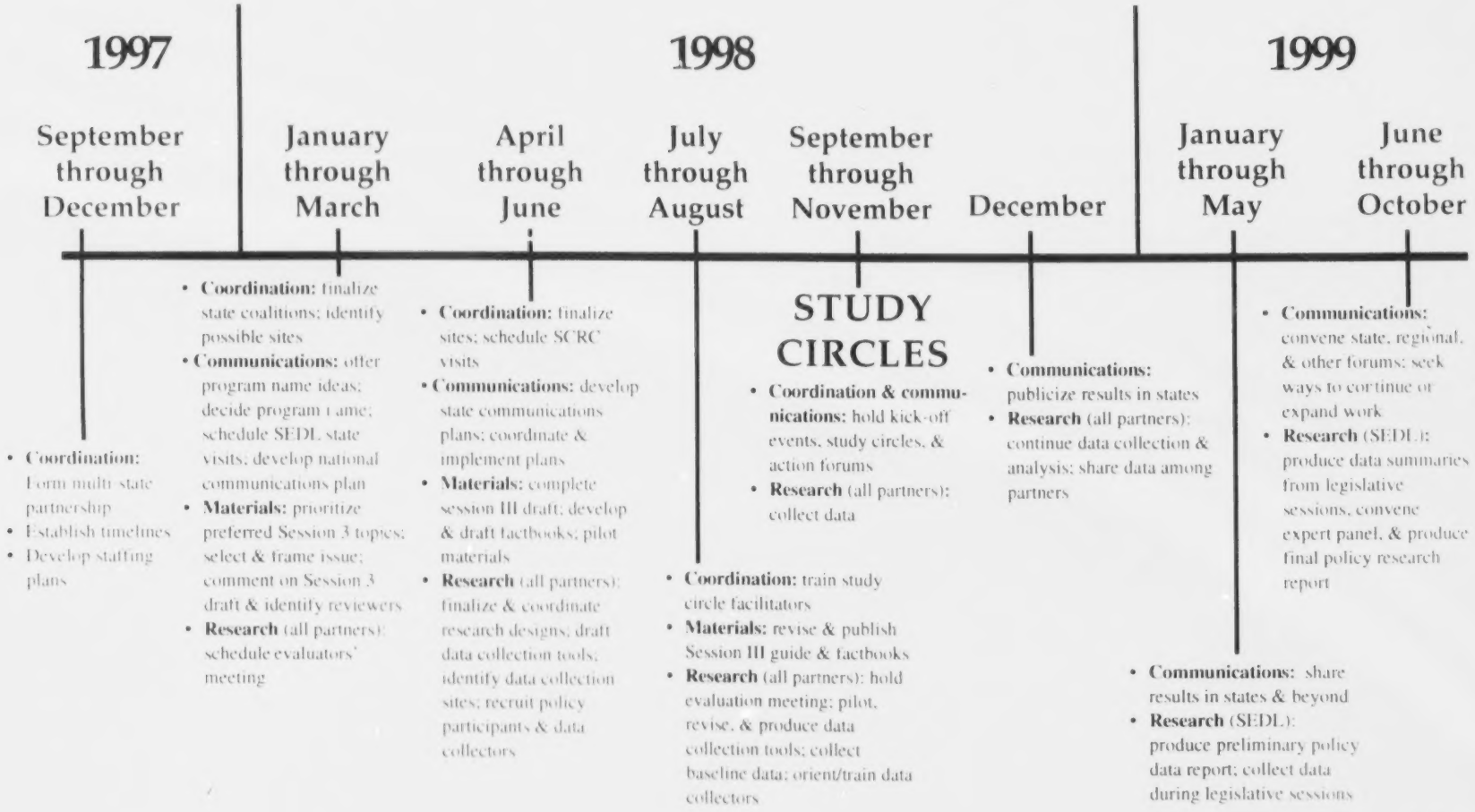
At present, each partner is conducting a separate research study based on one or more of its specific interests in participating in the program. The result will be an interrelated and mutually supporting set of studies that "capture the whole story" of the 1998 state-wide study circle program on education in Arkansas and Oklahoma. The research plan for SEDL's study of *Calling the Roll* appears in Section IV, beginning on page 12. Further details of the collaborative research are presented in Section V of this document.

## *Calling the Roll* Program and Post-Program Timeline

Planning and development activities for *Calling the Roll* began in the fall of 1997, and program coordination and implementation will culminate with the study circle sessions scheduled to take place between September 1 and November 30, 1998. Although local study circle programs are expected to finish by December 1998, research and dissemination activities in the Southwestern Region will be ongoing through 1999. A timeline for *Calling the Roll* and related post-program activities appears on the next page, highlighting major tasks by category. A timeline specifying the data collection activities to be conducted by SEDL is presented and discussed in Section IV.

## State-wide Study Circle Program on Education

# Program Timeline


1997
1998
1999
September through December
January through March
April through June
July through August
September through November
December
January through May
June through October
STUDY CIRCLES
• Coordination: Form multi-state partnership
• Establish timelines
• Develop staffing plans
• Coordination: finalize state coalitions; identify possible sites
• Communications: offer program name ideas; decide program name; schedule SEDL state visits; develop national communications plan
• Materials: prioritize preferred Session 3 topics; select & frame issue; comment on Session 3 draft & identify reviewers
• Research (all partners): schedule evaluators' meeting
• Coordination: finalize sites; schedule SCRC visits
• Communications: develop state communications plans; coordinate & implement plans
• Materials: complete session III draft; develop & draft factbooks; pilot materials
• Research (all partners): finalize & coordinate research designs; draft data collection tools; identify data collection sites; recruit policy participants & data collectors
• Coordination & communications: hold kick-off events, study circles, & action forums
• Research (all partners): collect data
• Coordination: train study circle facilitators
• Materials: revise & publish Session III guide & factbooks
• Research (all partners): hold evaluation meeting; pilot, revise, & produce data collection tools; collect baseline data; orient/train data collectors
• Communications: publicize results in states
• Research (all partners): continue data collection & analysis; share data among partners
• Communications: share results in states & beyond
• Research (SEDL): produce preliminary policy data report; collect data during legislative sessions
• Communications: convene state, regional, & other forums; seek ways to continue or expand work
• Research (SEDL): produce data summaries from legislative sessions, convene expert panel, & produce final policy research report



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*December 1998*

## SECTION IV

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SEDL RESEARCH STUDY OF *CALLING THE ROLL*

### Introduction

As briefly discussed in the previous section, one of SEDL's interests in the *Calling the Roll* program is the opportunity that the program presents for learning about the study circle process and how it might affect state policymaking. Towards this end, SEDL has planned a research study of the CR program that will examine both the impact of such a program on state education policymaking and the process of implementing a state-wide program of study circles on education that include state policymakers. Research results will be used to inform a number of different products, including a final report on research findings, short informational reports for use by policymakers and other interested audiences, and an informational video.

A brief schematic appears on the next page that summarizes major elements of the SEDL research study, including research goals, key questions, design approaches, data sources, and expected products. As the graphic shows, SEDL will pursue two primary research goals and follow two distinct research approaches. The first goal and corresponding approach will allow SEDL to uncover policy-relevant impacts of the program. The second goal and corresponding approach will allow SEDL to examine the process of CR implementation. Each research goal has been divided into a set of key questions that will be explored using a variety of data collection methods.

Immediately following the graphic is a detailed description of each of the elements displayed which elaborates on the scope of the research. While the basic structure of this research likely will remain unaltered, changes in coordination efforts or conditions in each state may create the need for modifications of the procedures.

# OVERVIEW OF THE SEDL RESEARCH STUDY

## Goals for SEDL Research Study[5]

1) To explore how state policymaker participation in study circles affects the education policymaking process.

2) To learn about the process of implementing a state-wide program of study circles on education that include state policymakers.

## Key Research Questions

### *Impact Study*

1. How do study circles on education provide state policymakers and their constituents with useful information?
2. What is the impact of study circles on state policymakers' relationships with constituents, as related to education?
3. What is the impact of study circles on state education policymaking activities and relevant civic participation?

### *Process Evaluation*

1. How is a state-wide program of study circles on education planned and implemented?
2. What strategies are used to involve state policymakers in study circles on education?
3. What are the costs of implementing and involving state policymakers in a state-wide program of study circles?

## Research Approach

Non-experimental, exploratory, descriptive study of impact of study circles

Evaluation of program implementation process

## Data Sources

Interviews with policymakers
Interviews with state coordinators and regional implementation staff
Interviews with selected expert public participants
Interviews with selected non-expert public participants
Surveys of state policymakers
Surveys of program participants
Observation of select study circle sessions
Review of documents

## Products

Technical report on results of research study
Guidebook for policymakers, agencies, and potential organizational sponsors of study circles
Informational reports for policymakers (policy briefs)
Informational video documenting the *Calling the Roll* implementation process and results

[5] The goals for this research study were developed based on SEDL's interest in learning from the implementation of state-wide programs of study circles on education that include policymakers, stated in Section III, page 10 of this document.

## Research Goals

As identified in Section III of this document, one of SEDL's major interests in the CR program is as follows:

> *Learn from the implementation of study circles on education that include policymakers, documenting impacts on state education policymaking and gaining insights on successful implementation strategies.*

This interest provides the basis for development of this research study of *Calling the Roll* and also guides the two major goals for the study. First, researchers will explore the impact of policymaker participation in study circles on the state education policy development process. Second, SEDL will examine the process of implementing a state-wide program of study circles on education that includes policymaker participation. The primary goals that will guide SEDL staff throughout the research study are as follows:

Goal One: To explore how state policymaker participation in study circles affects the education policymaking process.

Goal Two: To learn about the process of implementing a state-wide program of study circles on education that includes state policymakers.

In developing the research design, SEDL recognized the need to pursue two distinct research approaches to fully address the research goals listed above. The research approach appropriate to goal one is an exploratory descriptive study of program impacts, and the research approach appropriate to goal two is a process evaluation. These two approaches are described further in the two sections below.

## Goal One: Key Questions and Research Approach

### *Goal One Questions and Themes*

The first goal of SEDL's research study is to explore the impact of study circles on the state education policymaking process. The intent is to uncover evidence as to whether study circles provide a qualitatively different way for state policymakers and constituents to interact for the purpose of addressing public education and education policy issues. Three key questions will be used to frame goal one research:

1. How do study circles on education provide state policymakers and their constituents with useful information?

2. What is the impact of study circles on state policymakers' relationships with constituents, as related to education?

3. What is the impact of study circles on state education policymaking activities and relevant civic participation?

The above questions make use of three broad outcome categories associated with state policymaker participation in study circles: informational, relational, and civic action.[6] Informational outcomes include achieving access to different information sources, multiple viewpoints, and levels of expertise. Relational outcomes include changes in perceptions of or interaction between individuals or groups. Civic action outcomes include both changes in the state policymaking process and participation in civic activities.

Table 4.1 below illustrates the key questions for goal one and corresponding themes to be explored.

**Table 4.1: Goal One Key Questions And Corresponding Themes**

| | GOAL ONE KEY QUESTIONS | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *1. How do study circles on education provide state policymakers and their constituents with useful information?* | *2. What is the impact of study circles on state policymakers' relationships with constituents, as related to education?* | *3. What is the impact of study circles on state education policymaking activities and relevant civic participation?* |
| GOAL ONE GENERAL THEMES | • Identification of issues important to individuals and communities<br>• Understanding of common ground and of the public's willingness to weather trade-offs resulting from decisions<br>• Access to multiple layers of experience and expertise<br>• Exposure to diverse viewpoints | • Interaction in a safe, non-confrontational environment<br>• Increased willingness to listen to others rather than speak<br>• Forging of previously unidentified alliances (common ground)<br>• Changes in perceptions of other individuals or groups | • Increased willingness to take risks in developing new policies<br>• Increased participation in or organizing of civic activities<br>• Improvement of civic infrastructure and networks |

[6] SEDL staff have identified these three categories based on information gathered during the design phase of this research project. For a full discussion of these outcome categories, see "Results from Interviews of Policymaker Users of Deliberative Dialogue," currently in draft form.

### *Goal One Research Approach*

In designing the research approach for goal one of this study, SEDL staff decided to adopt a design that would help to obtain the most complete picture of the complex phenomenon under study. Given the fact that no research findings currently exist on the impact of study circles on policymaking and given the unique program elements of *Calling the Roll* (participation of policymakers and state-wide implementation), an exploratory descriptive research approach that relies predominately on qualitative data will be used. This approach, referred to in this document as an "impact study," emphasizes an in-depth description of how the program affects the education policymaking process, using interviews, observation, and the inductive abilities of the researchers as primary sources of data.

The impact study begins with general themes to be explored, in contrast to a narrow set of expected outcomes or the more detailed sub-themes that are being used to guide the goal two approach, outlined below. As is clear from Table 4.1, the general themes developed by SEDL are intentionally broad so that they will provide fundamental foci for the study but will also allow freedom to explore additional related phenomena that might emerge in the course of the study.

## Goal Two: Key Questions and Research Approach

### *Goal Two Questions and Themes*

The second research goal is concerned with documenting the *Calling the Roll* program and examining the implementation process, including planning, coordinating, and conducting the study circle sessions in the fall of 1998. Researchers will identify successful strategies and barriers related to the participation of policymakers in the program, and document the resources, planning, and coordination necessary to implement a state-wide study circle program on education. Three key questions will be asked in pursuit of goal two:

1. How is a state-wide program of study circles on education planned and implemented?

   Study circles have traditionally been used at the small group or local level and may or may not involve an education topic. Since coordination on community-wide and state-wide levels is critical to the program's relevance to state education policymakers, the model's applicability to organizing and implementing education discussions across a state will be an important focus of investigation.

2. What strategies are used to involve state policymakers in study circles on education?

   State education policymakers as well as their constituents will be targeted for participation in study circles. Modifications in program planning or implementation that facilitate the involvement of policymakers in the program will be examined.

3. What are the costs of implementing and involving state policymakers in a state-wide program of study circles?

   The success of a state-wide program depends on the provision of resources, either in-kind or monetary, for coordination, publicity, facilities, staffing, materials, travel expenses, and office expenses. The resources necessary for implementing and sustaining *Calling the Roll* will be tracked and analyzed by SEDL staff.

As the three key questions reveal, SEDL researchers will look at the study circle program implementation process in terms of its relevance for the successful participation of policymakers and their constituents. Researchers will look at a wide variety of elements necessary for successful implementation of study circles on education that occur at the state-wide level. Since program implementers will follow the basic steps of organizing a community-wide study circle program as described by the Study Circles Resource Center, SEDL will also track these steps as evaluation themes. The outline below provides a list of themes that will be examined by the SEDL research study. Table 4.2 displays these themes along with detailed sub-themes, their relation to the key questions of goal two, and key data sources.

*Coordination (state and local)*: In order to hold a successful state-wide study circle program with multiple local sites and many participating groups, coordination is necessary both at the state and local levels. SEDL will track the state coordination of *Calling the Roll*—documenting how state coordinators work to develop local coalitions, incorporate the participation of policymakers and constituents, and develop resources for the project.

*Coalition building*: Study circles are meant to be highly participatory, and the strength of the study circle model is that diverse groups and multiple sectors of the community are drawn into discussions. Policymaker interaction with constituents of all levels in the community is also a key feature of *Calling the Roll*. Coalition building at the state level and the relationship between state coordination and local coalitions are key foci of the study.

*Selecting and/or writing session materials*: Study circle discussions are guided by a set of written participant materials. A previously existing discussion guide for education study circles, *Education: How Can Schools and Communities Work Together to Meet the Challenge?*, will be modified for the CR program to enable policymakers and constituents to discuss a state policy issue. SCRC and SEDL will modify session three from this discussion

guide with input from CR partners and guidance from outside experts. SEDL also will produce a resource guide of education data and information specific to each state. The process of such materials development as well as the use of the materials in study circles will be documented for this research.

*Recruitment (facilitators, policymakers, and constituents)*: Study circle program implementation will involve recruitment at a number of different levels. As described in Section III of this document, SEDL will work to help recruit policymakers to participate in the CR program. Also, state and local coordinators will recruit other participants, with emphasis on diversity in order to bring all levels of the policymaker's constituency to the discussions on education. Recruitment strategies, barriers, and effects will be a major theme of the process evaluation.

*Media coverage and other publicity of events*: In order to reach a wide audience and ensure broad participation, publicity will be a key feature of program implementation. Through interviews of and logs from state coordinators, SEDL will document the use of media and other ways of generating community interest in the program and also will track related news coverage. The use of different media and publicity strategies by state coordinators will be observed, and coordinators will be asked to provide their perceptions of the success of their strategies.

*Study circle sessions*: Although *Calling the Roll* will involve study circles that are uniformly planned to use identical discussion materials and study topics, each circle will be unique in terms of the make up of the circles and the interests that individuals bring into the process. This study will examine the dynamics of those study circle sessions that include policymakers.

*Sustainability of state-wide study circle programs on education*: Although this last theme is not within the list of basic steps developed by SCRC, SEDL will explore the appropriateness and feasibility of longer term or subsequent interaction between policymakers and their constituents through study circles. Researchers will also identify elements of *Calling the Roll* that might result in longer-term operation of study circles on education in the program states.

**TABLE 4.2: Goal Two Key Questions, Corresponding Themes, and Sub-themes**

| GOAL TWO THEMES | GOAL TWO KEY QUESTIONS | | | DATA SOURCES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1. How is a state-wide program of study circles on education planned and implemented?* | *2. What strategies are used to involve state policymakers in study circles on education?* | *3. What are the costs of implementing and involving state policymakers in a state-wide program of study circles?* | |
| **Coordination** | • State and local coalition building<br>• Local site selection<br>• Coordination barriers | • State coordinator role and SEDL role in policymaker involvement | • Staffing/funding<br>• Essential resources<br>• Volunteer capacity<br>• Education system contribution | • Interviews with program staff<br>• Review of coordinator logs<br>• Policymaker interviews |
| **Coalition Building** | • Role of coalition<br>• Diversity of sponsors and participants<br>• Barriers/successes | • Role of elected/school officials, and policymakers in state and local coalitions | • Staffing/funding<br>• Essential resources<br>• Volunteer capacity<br>• Education system contribution | • Interviews with program staff<br>• Review of coordinator logs<br>• Policymaker interviews |
| **Selecting/ Writing Materials** | • Development and use of new materials<br>• Presentation of issues | • Utility of materials to policymakers | • Costs of development and distribution<br>• Availability and use of expert knowledge | • Interviews with program staff<br>• Review of coordinator logs<br>• Policymaker interviews |
| **Recruitment** | • Barriers and effective strategies<br>• Role of publicity<br>• Effect of education topic | • Barriers and effective strategies<br>• Role of publicity<br>• Effect of policymaker participation<br>• Effect of education topic | • Staffing/funding<br>• Essential resources<br>• Volunteer capacity<br>• Education system contribution | • Interviews with program staff<br>• Review of coordinator logs<br>• Policymaker and participant surveys<br>• Document review<br>• Policymaker and participant interviews |
| **Media and Publicity** | • CR-initiated vs. self-generated media coverage<br>• Role of media, kick off, etc.<br>• Other uses of media (internet, flyers, posters, etc.) | • Effect of publicity on policymakers<br>• Role of policymakers in generating publicity<br>• Effect of policymaker appearance at kick off or action forum | • Costs of media coverage or publicity<br>• Staffing necessary for effective publicity<br>• Volunteer capacity | • Interviews with program staff<br>• Review of coordinator logs<br>• Policymaker and participant surveys<br>• Document review<br>• Policymaker and participant interviews |
| **Study Circle Sessions** | • Consistency of session with study guide<br>• Education concerns<br>• Effect of current events<br>• Problems/Successes | • Role of policymaker<br>• Levels of policymaker participation<br>• Ed. concerns of policymakers<br>• Problems/Successes | • Staffing/funding to support sessions<br>• Changes in facilitator training to incorporate policymakers<br>• Facilities cost<br>• Volunteer capacity | • Interviews with program staff<br>• Review of coordinator logs<br>• Policymaker and participant surveys<br>• Document review<br>• Policymaker and participant interviews |
| **Sustainability of State-wide Programs** | • Identification of practices that foster sustainability<br>• Role of education topic in sustainability<br>• Identification of follow-up efforts and new planning activities | • Policymaker interest in participating in future programs<br>• State-level organizations' interest in sponsoring programs | • Staffing/funding to support ongoing programs<br>• Volunteer capacity<br>• Sustained technical support | • Interviews with program staff<br>• Policymaker and participant surveys<br>• Policymaker and participant interviews |

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*Goal Two Research Approach*

SEDL will document and describe the process of implementing and managing a state-wide program of study circles on education to address the questions posed for goal two of this study. An evaluation of the process will allow researchers to examine and assess the design, planning, and implementation of *Calling the Roll* for the purpose of gaining information about the study circle process and the feasibility of including policymakers in a state-wide program. Since this evaluation will document the implementation process, SEDL has designated the goal two research approach as a "process evaluation."[7] The results of the process evaluation will be used as contextual background information for the impact study that was described above, and will provide data for products developed by SEDL to assist other organizations in implementing future state-wide programs of study circles on education.

## Goal One and Goal Two Data Sources

As discussed in the preceding pages, the SEDL research study will examine both the impact of the CR program and the implementation process using two separate research approaches. An impact study will explore the effects of study circles on the policymaking process (goal one), and a process evaluation will focus on describing the process of implementing and managing a state-wide program of study circles on education that includes policymakers and their constituents (goal two). Both approaches will rely on the same data sources as listed in the table on the next page. The table also presents the relative importance each data source has for the two research goals.

[7] Rossi and Freeman (1993) discuss process evaluations and program monitoring in detail. Goal two key questions loosely follow the three elements of process studies presented by Rossi and Freeman: 1) service delivery and program design, 2) ability of intervention to reach the target population, and 3) resources expended for program implementation.

Table 4.3: Primary and Secondary Data Sources for Research Goals

| GOAL ONE AND GOAL TWO DATA SOURCES | GOAL ONE | | GOAL TWO | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Primary source | Secondary source | Primary source | Secondary source |
| Interviews with policymakers | X | | | X |
| Interviews with state coordinators and regional implementation staff (AFBS, LWVO, SCRC, SEDL staff) | | X | X | |
| Interviews with selected expert participants | X | | | X |
| Interviews with selected non-expert participants | X | | | X |
| Surveys of policymakers | X | | X | |
| Surveys of participants | X | | X | |
| Observation of select study circle sessions | X | | X | |
| Review of documents (program reports, coordinator monthly logs, local and state media reports, legislative reports) | X | | X | |

## Description of Data Sources and Collection Procedures

The data sources in Table 4.3 represent an appropriate mix for this study. A description of each data source and the actual procedures necessary to collect them are presented below. Site and sample selection criteria appear immediately after.

### *Interviews*

Guided interviews with individuals are used to document both program impacts (goal one) and the implementation process (goal two). Key informants who will be interviewed include state policymakers, state coordinators (AFBS and LWVO), regional implementation staff (SCRC and SEDL), expert study circle participants (educators, administrators, and others associated with the education profession) and non-expert participants (community members).

SEDL will develop written guides that will help structure the interviews. Face-to-face or phone interviews will be conducted by SEDL researchers, with limited assistance from hired interviewers. The interview guides will allow for a semi-structured question-and-answer session and will be developed for each of the populations of interest. All interviews will be audiotaped. At least 50 percent of each round of interviews will be fully transcribed. Any remaining interviews will be selectively transcribed (transcriptions of particularly relevant themes).

Interviews will be conducted periodically with state coordinators (2 individuals), SCRC technical assistance staff (2), and SEDL staff (1) who are involved in the implementation process (see Table 4.5). Since interviews with these state coordinators and regional implementation staff will be used primarily to inform the sub-themes developed for goal two of the SEDL research study, the interview guide developed for these interviews will contain an extensive list of detailed questions. Interviewers will be instructed to pursue all questions contained in the guide. Consequently, these interviews are expected to inform a predetermined set of issues, and interviewee responses will be more tightly bounded than in interviews with other key informants.

For the state policymaker, expert public, and non-expert public interviews, SEDL will develop more loosely defined interview guides that are meant to allow interviewers and interviewees the freedom to pursue the general themes for goal one and uncover unexpected themes of significance. Also, as the study progresses, questions will be altered in order to explore constructs of interest that emerge from earlier data. This approach puts much of the responsibility on SEDL staff to prioritize and develop research themes throughout the study. In order to control the bias inherent in this approach, monitoring of the process will be performed as described starting on page 31.

Key-informant interviews will be conducted with up to 20 state policymakers (ten from each state) who attend study circles in fall 1998, and six state policymakers who receive program reports only. Policymakers will be recruited and interviewed on a volunteer basis. Baseline interviews will be completed with the policymakers prior to their involvement with the program. Policymakers will be interviewed again following their participation in the study circles (or following their receipt of information generated by the study circles, if they do not participate). Policymakers will be interviewed a third time following the 1999 legislative session to assess the impact of the CR program on their personal decisionmaking activities related to education policy development. Follow-up interviews will be performed with a sub-sample of these policymakers (five from each state) approximately three months after these post-session interviews in order to assess longer-term impacts.

A limited set of interviews will be conducted with select members of the public who participated in study circles. These interviews will help track impacts related to interactions and information sharing between policymakers and their constituents, as well as civic action that might result from such interactions. During the study circle sessions, all participants will be invited to volunteer to be interviewed by providing their discussion facilitators with contact information for use by SEDL. Interviewees will be selectively sampled from those who participated in study circles in which a state policymaker was present. Initial interviews with ten members of the

expert public and ten members of the non-expert public in each state will be conducted after the study circle program has concluded. These post-program interviews will require the individuals to reflect retrospectively on their attitudes and behavior prior to, during, and after their involvement with study circles. Follow-up interviews will be conducted with a sub-sample of these same individuals approximately eight months after the end of the CR program. This sample (five members of the expert public and five members of the non-expert public per state) will be selected based on their previous interview responses.

*Surveys*

A variety of survey instruments will be developed by SEDL staff to collect more quantitative information than can be collected using interviews. Surveys will function both to facilitate the collection of basic demographic and attitude information from a larger sample of individuals than would be possible with interviews and to corroborate information obtained through interviews. Surveys will be administered to all policymakers who represent CR communities as well as to all participants (both policymaker and constituent participants) who attended *Calling the Roll* study circles.

*Policymaker Surveys.* A pre-program survey will be sent via mail to all legislators who represent the CR communities in both states, whether or not they plan to participate in the program. This survey will be administered prior to the start of the CR program in either state, to provide important baseline data that will inform SEDL's general knowledge about public engagement relative to the legislative policymaking process. A follow-up survey will be administered six to eight months following the conclusion of the program to these same legislators. Information gained from the pre-program and follow-up surveys of policymakers will be used for multiple purposes, including learning about public engagement and education policymaking, gauging policymaker interest in the study circle model, and measuring long term impacts of the study circle process on their work.

*Participant Surveys (policymakers and constituents).* SEDL will work with the other CR research partners to survey all participants who attend CR study circles. Since each of the program partners is interested in one or more aspects of the impact of study circles on participants, pre-program and post-program surveys will be incorporated into the actual implementation of study circles. Researchers from SEDL, SCRC, UALR, and UON will work collaboratively to develop and distribute these surveys that will be administered by study circle facilitators with the assistance of program coordinators. Approximately 1,000 study circle participants (policymakers and community members) are estimated to participate in the pre-program and

post-program surveys.[8] While the surveys will document a wide range of topics (satisfaction with the process, critical incidents that occurred during the sessions, changes in opinion and behavior as a result of participation, and basic demographic information), SEDL's interest in this survey focuses on participants as the constituents that policymakers represent. Specifically, SEDL is interested in the effectiveness of the study circles in helping policymakers and constituents interact, the information that is shared among stakeholders and between stakeholders and policymakers in the dialogue process, and civic participation patterns that might be affected by dialogue with state policymakers.

In addition to the pre-program and post-program participant survey, SEDL will work with program partners to administer an in-program survey to approximately 200 participants who attend study circles that include policymakers.[9] Facilitators will be asked to hand out and collect this survey at the end of the third study circle session using guidelines provided by CR researchers. The in-program survey will be used to document participant satisfaction with the process, to record important discussion topics that emerge from this session which is devoted to a policy-relevant issue, and to find out perceptions regarding the participation of a state education policymaker in the study circle.

The majority of survey questions will use a forced choice format or rating scale. Selective use will be made of open-ended questions. All surveys will be self-administered. A determination will be made as to whether it will be necessary to provide surveys for community members in both English and Spanish. Also, provisions will be made to enable individuals with lower reading levels to complete the survey.

*Observation*

SEDL researchers will use observation to inform both the impact study and the process evaluation. Trained observers (e.g., graduate students from local universities and state education policy analysts) will be assigned to observe up to six study circles that will be selected from the study circles that include state policymakers. SEDL researchers also will perform observations, both to gather process information and to gain first-hand familiarity with the range of interaction that occurs within study circles. Non-SEDL observers will receive instruction from SEDL staff to help sensitize them to the key issues under study. All observers will use a checklist to monitor the integrity with which the study circles are implemented and an observation guide to describe the

[8] Based on an estimate of 50 participants in each of 20 program sites.

[9] Based on an estimate of 10 participants in each of the 20 study circles that contain a policymaker.

interactions that occur between participants and state policymakers during the process.

*Activity Logs*

Monthly activity logs will be collected from the two state coordinators to gain insights on the implementation process in a more immediate and tangible fashion than is possible through periodic interviews. State coordinators also will be asked to provide copies of related artifacts (memos, letters, meeting agendas and summaries, press releases, evidence of press coverage).

The logs also will be used to stimulate memory during retrospective portions of the interviews with state coordinators and cue the interviewer to specific questions that should be asked. In effect, activity logs and associated artifacts will provide a different type of information on the process of implementation and also will serve to increase the dependability of the findings.

*Document Review*

Document collection and review will be used to provide additional information regarding the implementation of state-wide study circle programs for the process evaluation and to provide information on the educational context that might have a bearing on the analysis of impact data. Three major sources will be tapped for documentation:

1. SEDL staff will collect information from state (Arkansas and Oklahoma) and national media (primarily newspapers) on issues that relate to education or the study circle process. SEDL will use an on-line, searchable, full-text news service (Lexis Nexis) to collect this information. Staff will institute a protocol for document sorting and storage using both electronic and hard-copy cataloging systems.

2. SEDL will collect and review program reports that are generated by *Calling the Roll* recorders and coordinators. These reports will provide further primary and secondary data on the program implementation process and local and state-level impacts. These "reports" may be in a formal written format synthesized by state coordinators, or they may be original summaries of community-level record keeping.

3. In order to track major legislative issues on education in Arkansas and Oklahoma and the progress of 1999 education bills, SEDL will scan legislative updates made available by legislative staff in electronic or hard-copy format.

## Site and Sample Selection Criteria

As the discussion of the data sources reveals, a large number of interviews, surveys, and observations will be conducted for the research study of *Calling the Roll*. For the reader's convenience, Table 4.4 summarizes the site and sample selection criteria to be used for each data source.

**Table 4.4: Site and Sample Selection Criteria for Interviews and Surveys to be Conducted for SEDL's *Calling the Roll* Research Study**[10]

| PROCEDURE | SITE/SAMPLE SELECTION CRITERIA |
|---|---|
| Coordinator Interviews | All state coordinators, SCRC technical assistance staff, and SEDL staff who assist with CR implementation will be interviewed, representing the universe. |
| SCRC Staff Interviews | |
| SEDL Staff Interviews | |
| State Policymaker Interviews (Pre-Program, Post-Program, Post-Session) | Up to twenty policymakers in CR communities who indicate a willingness to participate in study circles and up to six policymakers who indicate an interest in receiving reports on the program will be selected. |
| State Policymaker Interviews (Follow-Up) | A subset of the policymakers who participated in pre-program interviews will be selected based on responses to previous surveys and interviews. Selection will be based on a variety of indicators, including diversity, participation level in the study circle process, and expected use of information gained from study circles. |
| Expert Participant Interviews (Post-Program and Follow-Up) | Members of the expert and non-expert public who participated in study circles containing a state policymaker and who volunteer to be interviewed by researchers will be selected. Initial selection will be based on the level of participation by the policymaker and geographic diversity. The refined sample for follow-up interviews will be based on a variety of indicators, including diversity, self-assessed civic participation, interest level in the study circle process, and personal exposure to education experience and information. |
| Non-expert Participant Interviews (Post-Program and Follow-Up) | |
| State Policymaker Surveys (Pre-Program and Follow-Up) | All legislators that represent any of the CR communities in Arkansas and Oklahoma will receive surveys. Final respondent pool will be determined by response rate of this mail survey. |
| Participant Survey (Pre- and Post-Program, administered before study circle session one and after session four) | All study circle participants (policymaker and expert/non-expert public) will receive surveys. Final respondent pool will be determined by response rate of this survey. |
| Participant Survey (In-Program, administered after study circle session three) | All participants in study circles that contain a policymaker participant will receive surveys. Final respondent pool will be determined by response rate of this survey. |
| Observation | The sample of study circles to be observed will be based on whether a state policymaker is present in the study circle. Selection among multiple observation opportunities will be based primarily on convenience, however, an attempt will be made to choose three geographically distinct sites in each state. |

[10] For information on sample sizes for each procedure, see Table 4.5.

## Data Collection Timeline

As already stated, the time period for this research study begins June 1998 and extends to the fall of 1999 (the *Calling the Roll* program, however, terminates with the last study circle activities in November 1998).

Data collection activities are separated into five distinct time periods:

1. The **pre-program period** refers to the time period before study circle sessions begin in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

2. The **in-program period** will be considered to be the time between the start of the first study circle session and the end of the last session for each community; each community will have a distinct in-program time period due to the variety of start and end dates among CR communities.

3. The **post-program period** also will be distinct for each community; it begins immediately after the end of the last CR study circle session in the community and continues until the beginning of the 1999 legislative session in that state (January 11 in Arkansas, February 1 in Oklahoma).

4. The **post-session period** will be distinct for each state; it begins immediately with the close of the legislative session in Arkansas (March 11) and ends soon after the close of the Oklahoma session (May 28).

5. The **follow-up period** begins three months after the end of the legislative session in each state and continues through August 1999, when data collection for this research will be complete.

Although a more comprehensive graphic depicting data collection procedures in a timeline format appears on page 29, Table 4.5 briefly represents the data collection goals for the research study.

**Table 4.5: Number of Interviews, Surveys, and Observations to be Conducted for SEDL's *Calling the Roll* Research Study**

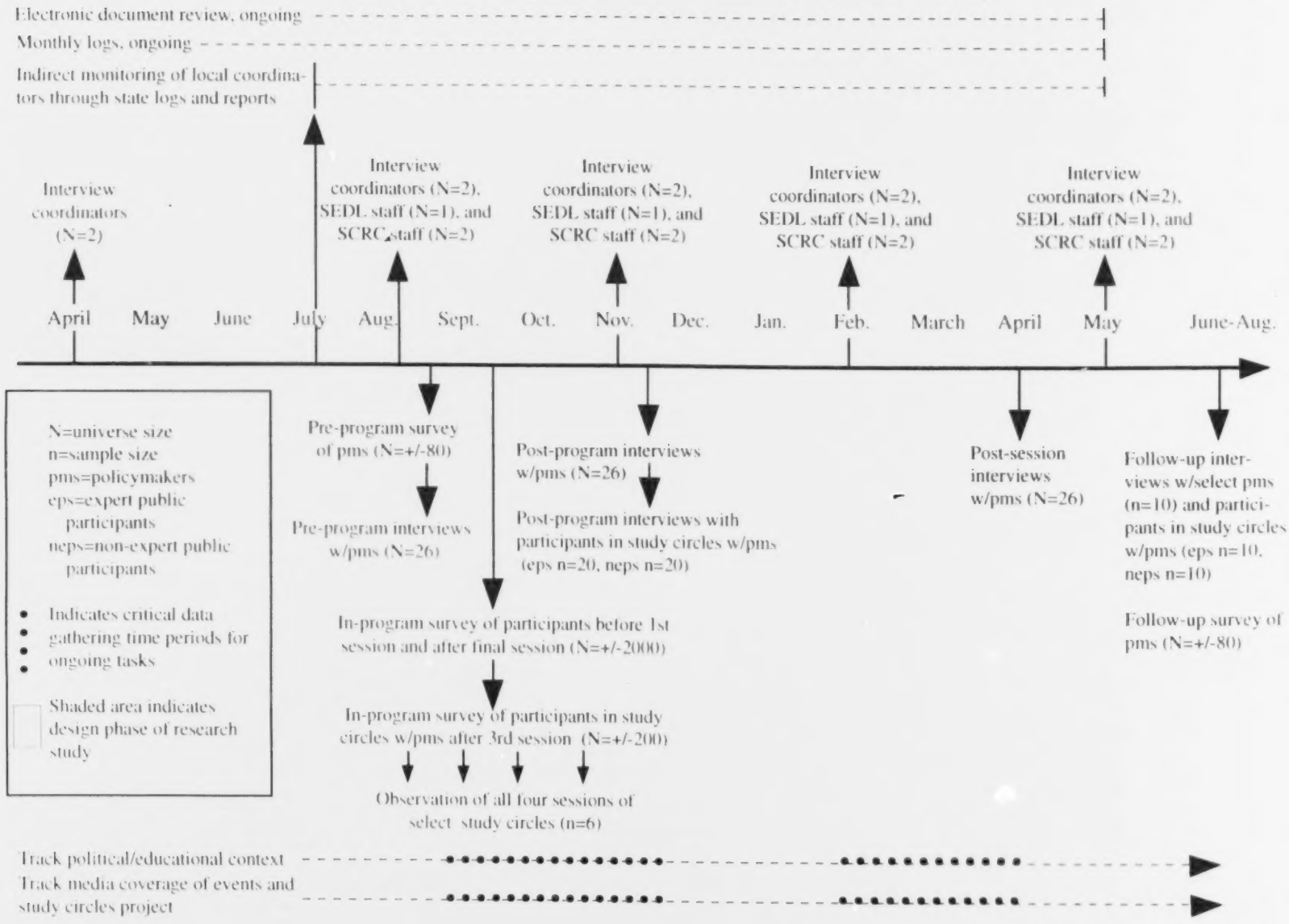
| PROCEDURE (total) | Pre-Program before 9/98 | In-Program 9/98 to 12/98 | Post-Program 10/98 to 2/99 | Post Session 3/99 to 6/99 | Follow Up 6/99 to 8/99 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Coordinator Interviews (10) | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| SCRC staff interviews (8) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| SEDL staff interviews (4) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Policymaker interviews (88) | 26 | 0 | 26 | 26 | 10 |
| Expert part. interviews (30) | 0 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 10 |
| Non-expert part. interviews (30) | 0 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 10 |
| Surveys of policymakers (48) | 24[11] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24[11] |
| Surveys of participants (2200) | 0 | 2200[12] | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Observation of study circles (6) | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

[11] Assumes a 30% response rate, N=+/-80.

[12] Includes 1,000 surveys administered before the first study circle session, 200 after the third study circle session, and 1,000 after the last study circle session. Note that SEDL is part of a shared, multi-agency effort to develop and implement these surveys to participants (see page 23 for details).

## SEDL Research Study of *Calling the Roll*

# DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE (1998-1999)


PROCESS EVALUATION
IMPACT ANALYSIS
Electronic document review, ongoing
Monthly logs, ongoing
Indirect monitoring of local coordinators through state logs and reports
Interview coordinators (N=2)
Interview coordinators (N=2), SEDL staff (N=1), and SCRC staff (N=2)
Interview coordinators (N=2), SEDL staff (N=1), and SCRC staff (N=2)
Interview coordinators (N=2), SEDL staff (N=1), and SCRC staff (N=2)
Interview coordinators (N=2), SEDL staff (N=1), and SCRC staff (N=2)
April
May
June
July
Aug.
Sept.
Oct.
Nov.
Dec.
Jan.
Feb.
March
April
May
June-Aug.
N=universe size
n=sample size
pms=policymakers
eps=expert public participants
neps=non-expert public participants
Indicates critical data gathering time periods for ongoing tasks
Shaded area indicates design phase of research study
Pre-program survey of pms (N=+/-80)
Pre-program interviews w/pms (N=26)
Post-program interviews w/pms (N=26)
Post-program interviews with participants in study circles w/pms (eps n=20, neps n=20)
Post-session interviews w/pms (N=26)
Follow-up interviews w/select pms (n=10) and participants in study circles w/pms (eps n=10, neps n=10)
Follow-up survey of pms (N=+/-80)
In-program survey of participants before 1st session and after final session (N=+/-2000)
In-program survey of participants in study circles w/pms after 3rd session (N=+/-200)
Observation of all four sessions of select study circles (n=6)
Track political/educational context
Track media coverage of events and study circles project

## Data Analysis Timeline and Techniques

Data analysis will begin with the post-program data collection period and continues through the fall of 1999, after final data is collected in August. Data analysis techniques have been selected to help develop a dependable, credible, and accessible accounting of both the impact of the program on the state education policymaking process and the factors involved in successfully implementing and including state policymakers in a state-wide program of study circles on education.

Qualitative data analysis. Three types of coding methods suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) will be used to analyze the qualitative data (interviews, observation, and document review). For the sake of clarity in description, the analysis will be described as occurring in discrete stages; however, in reality, the analysis of the data will not occur in a linear fashion but will move back and forth among the different coding methods throughout the process of analysis.

In the first stage of analysis, interview transcripts and secondary sources of data will be analyzed using open-coding methods. The data will be examined line by line and broken into discrete events. Conceptual labels will be attached to these events or happenings. Next, concepts will be grouped into thematic categories and the properties and dimensions of each of the categories will be explored. Additional data will be collected when relevant to adding detail to category properties and dimensions.

In the second stage of analysis, data will be analyzed using axial coding methods.[13] This phase will emphasize elaboration of the themes and sub-themes previously identified in this section (pp. 15-20) as well as exploration of newly emergent themes and categories, and exceptions to both the themes and the emergent categories will be sought through selective (purposeful) sampling methods to dimensionalize the findings. The conditions that gave rise to various phenomena identified by open coding, the context in which these phenomena occur, the strategies used by others to initiate or manage the phenomena, and the consequences of those strategies also will be examined during this stage. New data will continue to be collected to validate and to further elucidate the dimensions.

In the third stage, selective coding methods will be used to explicate the central or core themes present in the data, termed the "story-line" by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Also as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990), "process" or movement that is present in the data will be analyzed by identifying why and how actions and interactions changed, stayed the same,

[13] For a description of the axial coding method, see Strauss and Corbin, 1990.

or regressed; why events progressed in the face of changing conditions; and what the consequences of these events entailed.

Finally, utilizing "member-check" procedures, experts in dialogue and select participants will be asked to review the findings of the coding processes several times during the course of the analysis and again at the end of the analysis to confirm the face validity of the findings.

Quantitative data. Basic frequency and central tendency calculations will be used to analyze the numerical survey data.

## Monitoring and Internal Quality Control

Given the size and complexity of the program, it will be important for SEDL staff to assess the quality and effectiveness of its research activities on a regular basis. Following are methods that will be used to ensure the quality and appropriateness of the research.

*Investigator Bias.* In qualitative studies of this type, the investigator functions as the primary analytic tool. Thus, it is important to be aware that each individual will bring his or her unique background to the program, along with a certain amount of interpretive bias. Program staff will attempt to minimize the effect of personal bias by providing instruction to interviewers and observers hired to collect data. Instruction will include sensitivity to the topics under study, information about the scope and goals of the research, and discussion of bias in qualitative studies.

*Internal Audits.* Periodic assessments will be made to gauge the degree to which the research design, activities, and products are consistent with the research goals. The audit will assess both the degree to which the needed data is being collected and the quality of the data. Changes in data collection methods will be made at this time if indicated.

*External Peer Review.* As has been done in the initial development of this research study plan, informal and formal consultations will be held with researchers involved in similar programs to inform changes in the research design as the program progresses. Potential sources for these ongoing consultations include the SCRC, the Congressional Exchange, the Annenberg Foundation, the Hogg Foundation, and the University of Texas.

*Instrument Development and Testing.* Interviews and surveys will be piloted with a select number of participants to solicit the individuals' comfort with the interview or survey and to recommend necessary changes before the instruments are implemented program wide.

*Confirmation of Reliability of Findings.* As described above, SEDL's data gathering and analysis procedures utilize the credibility and confirmability criteria recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in order to establish the reliability of research findings. Specific techniques include:

- Triangulation of data. This technique uses several types of data, namely interviews, observations, surveys, and document review.
- Member checks (external). Individuals involved in the program and experts in the field are asked to comment on the face validity of the findings.
- Member checks (internal). SEDL researchers will monitor and perform cross checks of each other's coding and analysis of the data.
- The constant comparative method recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Data are analyzed as collected, and emerging categories and themes are constantly compared back to the data and explored in remaining data collection activities.
- Referential adequacy. Portions of the data are not included in the initial data analysis but are reserved for comparison to the models that emerge from the data.

## Recruitment

*Interview Recruitment.* SEDL staff will have primary responsibility for the recruitment of state policymakers and community members for the interviews planned for this research. SEDL will not only recruit policymakers for interviews but also will encourage their participation in the study circle program in both states. As SEDL staff work with program coordinators to solicit the participation of policymakers in the program through letters and personal communication, policymakers will also be informed and invited to become key information sources for the research study. SEDL staff will rely on assistance from local coordinators and facilitators to recruit the non-expert and expert public for participation in interviews, as well as for cooperation in completing survey forms as discussed below.

*Survey Recruitment.* Surveys of program participants (policymakers and constituents) will be integrated into the study circle implementation process with the help of program partners and local coordinators. SEDL researchers will inform program facilitators and local organizers about the survey component of *Calling the Roll.* Detailed instructions regarding survey administration will be provided to all facilitators, clearly stating when surveys should be provided to participants and how many surveys to conduct. Facilitators will be requested to assist those participants who have low reading levels in completing surveys. Facilitators also will ask participants to indicate their willingness to volunteer to receive further communication from SEDL researchers regarding follow-up interviews.

Those volunteers who are selected for post-program and follow-up interviews will be contacted for recruitment via phone and mail by SEDL staff.

## Confidentiality and Informed Consent

Related to the issue of recruitment are the consent procedures to be implemented for this study. Participation in research activities by state policymakers and the expert and non-expert public will be completely voluntary and will in no way affect their right to otherwise participate in the CR study circle program. Consent will be received from study subjects at the initial invitation to participate, before actual interviews or surveys are conducted, and before interviews are audiotaped or otherwise recorded. Data recorded as a result of surveys or interviews will be kept confidential, unless the interview subject gives written permission to SEDL to quote or otherwise reproduce identifiable information. Otherwise, data results will be disseminated only in the aggregate, as anonymous statements, or as unidentifiable case studies. Personal contact information will be asked of all research subjects in order to facilitate follow-up surveys and interviews; however, this information will be kept confidential, and participants will be contacted only if prior permission is granted. Written notice of SEDL's intentions regarding the use of all data collected from research subjects will be provided to all who participate.

## Instrumentation

Data collection instruments will undergo review by *Calling the Roll* partners as part of SEDL's internal and external peer review process. The questions and themes that are presented at the beginning of this section will provide the initial basis for specific questions included in instruments. After comments are received by program partners, SEDL staff will pilot the draft instruments for effectiveness and ease of use before final documents are created. Baseline data collected using these instruments will go on to inform the next round of interviews and surveys. Post-program and follow-up instrumentation will be developed following a similar process.

## Dissemination of Results

One of the primary tasks of SEDL is to develop a mix of products that will inform state and local policy audiences about the usefulness and feasibility of deliberative dialogue processes and how the particular method tested—the study circle process—could be implemented in their communities or states. Products will include: report(s) discussing both process and impact results of the SEDL research study; an informative video about the *Calling the Roll* program that tells the "Whole Story" of the Arkansas and Oklahoma

experiences; and information for policymakers in the form of policy briefs. If research results warrant, SEDL also will produce a guidebook that provides assistance to state policymakers and groups interested in replicating the program in other locations—particularly for the purpose of including state policymakers and contributing to the state education policymaking process.

## SECTION V

# RESEARCH DESIGN THAT CAPTURES THE WHOLE STORY: COLLABORATIVE STUDY OF STATE-WIDE PROGRAMS OF STUDY CIRCLES ON EDUCATION

## Summary

Each of the four *Calling the Roll* partners will conduct a separate research study based on its specific interests in participating in the CR program. The potential result is an interrelated and mutually supporting set of studies that "captures the whole story" of the 1998 state-wide programs of study circles on education in Arkansas and Oklahoma. This research will collect information about the local and state processes of deliberation and coordination and also will describe the impact each has on participants—including community members, their elected representatives, and the organizers of state-wide democratic deliberations.

SEDL's policy staff will specifically focus on the impact of study circles on state education policymaking, and the process of implementing a state-wide program of study circles on education that involves policymakers. This section presents a brief discussion of the foci of the other three partners' research, the data collection of another SEDL project (Language and Diversity Program), and opportunities for collaboration among all research teams.

## Foci of Partners' Research Studies

Arkansas Friends for Better Schools are contracting with Dr. Larry Dickerson (Center for the Research of Teaching and Learning, University of Arkansas at Little Rock) to develop and conduct an evaluation of the local impact of study circles in participating Arkansas communities. Data collection includes descriptive statistics on what happens in study circle communities as a result of the program—with an emphasis on quantitative evidence in four areas: citizen participation, study circle program implementation, study circle program institutionalization, and study circle impact on the community.

The Oklahoma League of Women Voters is contracting with Dr. Wil Scott (Department of Sociology, University of Oklahoma at Norman) to assess positive change along broad measures of citizen involvement. Although this includes an interest in hard data on study circle participants, deeper interest is in how the study circle process works and what its effects are on participants as community members and citizens. In-depth observation of a few study

circles, which can yield important findings about participant interaction and the content of the dialogue on education, will be the focus of this study.

SCRC has greatest interest in conducting an implementation evaluation. The *Calling the Roll* program in Arkansas and Oklahoma provides an opportunity to learn how the process of organizing on a state level compares with organizing at the community level. As such, the SCRC evaluation includes data collection from local coordinators that complements information collected by SEDL from the state coordinators. SCRC staff also are interested in validating a study circle model that includes federal-level policymakers in community-wide study circle program (recently developed by Congressional Exchange).

SEDL's language and cultural diversity staff members would like to learn how the study circle process works in groups of people with diverse backgrounds. They propose data collection limited to observation and participant interviews in up to ten study circles during the fall 1998 program. Although the nature of the work does not permit the kind of cooperation possible among the other four studies, SEDL diversity staff activities and products, as a result of this research, will be shared with all partners to benefit future study circle programs in communities of diverse languages and cultures.

## Collaboration

Because there are a number of shared research interests among the partners, the potential for developing a unified research plan is strong. The benefits of a collaborative research effort are clear: collaboration would expand both the scope and the value of CR research beyond that which could be achieved by a single partner acting alone. A collaborative research effort would require at the very least the development of a complementary or unified research design, the use of complementary methods and tools, and the designation of a research coordinator whose role (at a minimum) is to coordinate regular communications among CR partners. The coordinator will also facilitate the data sharing among partners that has been formally agreed upon in the Arkansas and Oklahoma subcontracts with SEDL.

CR partners will use parallel protocols and create shared data collection instruments. Program researchers will develop a common participant survey instrument for use by all of the partners. Dr. Dickerson will oversee data entry and scanning of survey data, and the partners will work together to administer surveys to all study circle participants. In its updated facilitators' guidebook, SCRC has provided an observation checklist that will be adapted to record content information from study circle sessions that is of interest to SEDL and UON. Evaluators will communicate regularly via teleconferencing and email to consult on design issues and development of survey forms,

interview protocols, databases, and dissemination opportunities. This communication also will allow researchers to identify further opportunities to complement and enhance each other's work.

**Table 5.1: Primary Research Foci of Partners**

| Research Focus | SEDL | SCRC | AFBS | LWVO |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Implementation of education study circles (SCs) | X | | X | X |
| Implementation of SCs that include state policymakers | X | X | | |
| Implementation of state-wide SC programs | X | X | X | X |
| Degree to which SCs facilitate presentation of multiple viewpoints | X | | X | |
| Impact of SCs on policymaker-community relationship | X | | | |
| Impact of SCs on information available to state policymakers | X | | | |
| Impact of SCs on policymakers' and/or community's level of civic involvement | X | | | X |
| Impact of SCs on policymakers' and/or community members' knowledge of education issues | X | | X | X |
| Impact of SCs on educators | X | | | |
| Impact of SCs on state policymaking process | X | | | |
| Long-term structural impact of SCs | X | X | X | X |
| Impact of SCs on local education system | | | X | |

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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Arkansas Friends for Better Schools**—Arkansas Friends for Better Schools is an alliance of advocates for public education representing education, business, civic, and religious organizations. Sponsored by the Arkansas Interfaith Conference, Arkansas Friends was founded in late 1993 and funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation through March 1997. Friends also enjoys substantial in-kind support from Southwestern Bell Telephone. Arkansas Friends was originally founded to provide information to its members and to the public about systemic school reform, particularly as defined under Act 236 of 1991. A key interest of the alliance is to build support for reform and public schools in the state.

**action forum**—A community-wide event at the conclusion of the study circle program. The action forum can inform participants about future action opportunities or provide the opportunity for groups and individuals to form new coalitions and plan more study circles. This forum is also a chance for participants to share experiences with each other and officials or policymakers.

***Calling the Roll***—A collaborative program that will implement state-wide study circles on education in Arkansas and Oklahoma during September through November 1998.

**deliberative dialogue**—A mode of communication that enables individuals to constructively discuss an issue of shared concern with the purpose of increasing understanding of diverse perspectives and coming to a common sense of direction and potential action.

**expert public**—Members of the local community who have expertise or specific knowledge regarding the topic discussed in a study circle. For *Calling the Roll*, expert public members will include school administrators, educators, education advocates, and education researchers.

**facilitator**—The designated discussion leader for a study circle session. Facilitators are not necessarily experts in the topic of discussion but do receive training in helping people listen and engage in constructive dialogue.

**focus group**—Structured public gathering in which the sponsoring entity solicits the opinions of participants on a single issue. Generally used as a method to extract opinions from a specially chosen group of participants who are screened using established criteria.

**issues forums**—A model that puts into practice concepts of deliberative dialogue. Issues forums are similar to study circles; however, issues forums

are planned as large group discussions that occur in a single event, whereas study circles emphasize a series of small group dialogues over time.

**kick-off forum**—A community-wide event that initiates the study circle program. The kick off helps draw media and community visibility to the study circles and helps recruit potential sponsoring organizations.

**League of Women Voters of Oklahoma**—A nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

**non-expert public**—Members of the local community who have no special knowledge or expertise regarding the study circle topic.

**public engagement**—An interactive process that provides an opportunity for the public to participate in dialogue pertaining to decisions that will impact community structures and systems.

**study circle process**—A specific approach to broad-scale engagement of community members in small group deliberation.

**Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC)**—A project of Topsfield Foundation to promote the study circle model. SCRC provides technical assistance, materials development, and research to help states and communities implement their own study circles. **Congressional Exchange** is a similar Topsfield project that applies the model at the national level.

**state coordinator**—Designated individual who is responsible for the state-level coordination of *Calling the Roll* in each of the two states.

**state policymakers**—Policymakers and state-level decisionmakers.

**state-wide study circle program**—A program coordinating the implementation of community-wide study circles in multiple communities across a state.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

**AFBS**—Arkansas Friends for Better Schools

**CR**—*Calling the Roll*

**LWVO**—League of Women Voters of Oklahoma

**OERI**—Office of Educational Research and Improvement

**SCs**—study circles

**SCRC**—Study Circles Resource Center, a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc.

**SEDL**— Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

**UALR**—University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Center for the Research of Teaching and Learning

**UON**—University of Oklahoma, Norman, Department of Sociology